APPAR

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

APPAR

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CHAPTER 1

Ich Dien

In the 7th century A.D. a saint in Tamilnadu had this motto as his ideal in life. He sang:

My duty is to serve and rest content.

Of course, he made what I may call a proviso in a previous line. In the same song he said:

Thy duty on the other hand, is to hold me fast.

In these two lines he defined clearly his duty towards his Maker and his Maker's duty unto him.

His parents named him Marulneekkiyaar; God conferred on him the title of Thiru-naavukku-arasar. The first name has long since been forgotten. His second is current among scholars only. There was another name which was given to him by a child of six or eight years of age. When they met, Thiru-naavukku-arasar was 40 or more. On seeing this elderly person, the child spontaneously and most lovingly addressed him 'Appare', 'O Papa!' And this is the name by which the common man in Tamilnadu knows him. Strangely enough, Appar (Father) had no children of his own. But all the world calls him 'Father', 'Papa', even as all the world calls God 'Our Father in Heaven'.

Appar lived for eighty-one years, probably from A.D. 610 to 691; and we may say that he straddled the 7th century. In a sense, we may call the 7th century Apar Century Such must have been his great inpact on the religious and social life of the people of Tamilnadu, particularly of the country stretching from

Madurai right up to Madras and beyond. The child who called him, 'O Papa,' Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, who lived for just one-fifth of the span of the life of Appar, came into the latter's life at about his 40th year. Nevertheless, in the series of devotional works in Tamil called Thirumurais, the works of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, three volumes in number, are placed prior to the works of Appar, also three volumes in number. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar could be said to have lived between 642 and 658. The reason for giving the first place to Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar's works is that he sang his first song when he was three years old, probably, five years before he met Appar, and three or four years before Appar sang his first song. The lives of these two saints are very closely knit together. They met three times in their lives and, in one way, Appar's life could be divided into parts which lay between each meeting.

Appar's ministry began, we may presume, at or after his 40th year; in no case could it have been earlier. In the last four decades of his life he visited on foot no less than 125 shrines of Lord Civan, scattered over a territory of thousands of square miles. Moreover, he was the only one of the four great saints of Tamilnadu to visit the shrine at Thirukkokarnam on the western sea coast between Mangalore and Marmagoa. Today, it is in North Karnataka State. This is not to be confused with a small shrine on the outskirts of Pudukottai. He went even further, as far as the foot of the Himalayas, intending to reach Kailas, the abode of Lord Civan, but was commanded by Him to desist and go south to Thiruvaiyaaru. In this attempt, he rivalled only one saint of Tamilnadu, Karaikkaal Ammaiyaar, who reached the presence of Lord Civan in Kailas, and was graciously hailed by Him, 'O Mother', a signal honour indeed. She too was commanded to return south and abide in Thiruvaalankadu.

He sang no less than three hundred and twelve decads comprising 3064 stanzas of great sweetness and greater devotion. However, nearly half his life had to pass in misery and suffering, before he was to sing the very first stanza of his three thousand and more songs.

CHAPTER 2

Early Years[1]

Appar was born in Thiruvaamoor, a village in a taluk called Munaippaadi. This taluk may well have been a district which corresponds to the present South Arcot District in Tamilnadu. His parents, Pugazhanaar and Maathiniyaar came from a sub-caste called Kurukkiyar, the main caste being Velaalar. This word, Velaalar, means, in general, the peasantry, but it has a special significance in which sense it has been used by Thiruvalluvar in his chapter called 'Trusteeship of Wealth'. He legislated that

> All the wealth acquired at great pains by worthy people is for being used in the service of humanity.
> (*Thirukkural*—212)

The word for 'Service' in Tamil is 'Velaanmai'—the act of serving. It is no wonder that Appar declared, 'My duty is to serve and rest content.'

Appar's elder sister, Thilakavathiyaar, was betrothed to a captain in the army, but, before the wedding could be performed, the parents of Thilakavathiyaar and Appar died one after the other leaving the children as desolate orphans. What could have been the age of Thilakavathiyaar at that time? Certainly, not more than fourteen at the most. Tragedy upon tragedy came to the orphaned children in the form of the death on the battle-

1. This entire monograph is based on Sekkizhaar's *Periya-puraanam* and internal evidence culled from Appar's own songs.

field of the husband-to-be of Thilakavathiyaar. Straightaway she declared her resolve to put an end to her own life, probably according to the traditional rites of *sathi*, that is, ascending the funeral pyre of the husband. Appar, then, perhaps, a child of eight or ten, fell at the feet of his sister, wailing, 'What is to happen to me?' and implored her to live for his sake. She magnanimously consented, and brought up her young brother to manhood in a manner which her parents could not have excelled.

He took charge of his estate, quite a vast one it should have been, when he came of age and discharged his duties as a rich man, on the lines laid down by Thiruvalluvar for the rich. Sekkizhaar, the hagiographer of the saints of Tamilnadu, records his performance thus:

Realising the impermanence of worldly life,
he performed several charities,
establishing his fame in the world
by generous endowments,
and, moved by compassion, set up
free feeding houses and water booths.

Thiru-naavakku-arasar, st. 35

Forests he planted, tanks he dug;
remaining unfailing in the performance of his duties,
joyously gave to those who sought his help
whatever they needed;
and hospitality he bestowed on those
who came to his door.
To scholars he munificently gave,
and on everyone in the world unfailing alms
bestowed.

T. st. 36

He looked around and came to realise
the impermanence of worldly life, and said to himself,
'I shall not be a victim to this ephemeral life,'
and full of desire to learn the philosophy

Thiru-naavakku-arasar is hereinafter abbreviated to T.

and practices of other religions in the country,
he approached Jainism, whose chief tenet is non-killing.

T. st 37

Forthwith, Appar went to Paatalipuram, a strong-hold of the Jain Monks, which was, probably, on the sea-shore, quite close to the present Thiruppaathirippuliyoor, which is situated on the Main Railway Line from Madras to Thanjavoor, three kilometres to the north of Cudaloor Junction. He joined a Jain Monastery.

On Appar leaving her, Thilakavathiyaar left her village and took shelter in the temple of Lord Civan at Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam, and engaged herself in the service of the Lord day and night.

CHAPTER 3

Appar and Jainism

In relating Appar's approaching Jainism, Sekkizhaar uses a particular expression. He says 'Our Lord did not bestow His grace.' Sekkizhaar's hagiography makes out Appar to be an apostate when he went to study Jainism and a repentant prodigal son when he returned to Caivism.

At what age Appar went over to Jainism, we do not know. In any case, he could not have been younger than twenty years; in all probability, he was nearer twenty-five than anything less. Appar spent many many years as a Jain. He went through all the disciplines prescribed for a Jain Monk including the plucking out of the hairs of his head one by one till he was totally bald, a most painful experience by any standard. He rose, it is said, in the Jain hierarchy till he came to a very high and honoured position, and was given the name of Dharmasenar. He was most implicitly trusted by his colleagues and by the then reigning Pallava King, in all probability, Narasimhha Varma the First, son of Mahendra Pallavan who ruled from A.D. 600 to 630. Appar lived during the reign of both these kings. At the very height of his power and position in the Jain spiritual hierarchy, he was seized by a torturous colic which defied all the skill of the medicine-men in the Jain monastery and in the king's service. Medicine-men, I call them deliberately, for their treatment was by drugs, incantations, black magic and sorcery. The more the mantras were tried, the worse grew the colic. In desperation, Appar's thoughts turned to his sister, and he secretly sent for her. Thilakavathiyaar, who had been more and

more distressed with the news of Appar's power and position. and who believed sincerely that her brother had become a renegade to Lord Civan and Caivism, refused to go to Appar, and instead, bade him go to her. Which he did one day, in the dead of night, clad head to foot in a white garment. He stumbled in the dark night, with no one to guide him, through fields and furrows, and ditches and dunes, and, at last, before daybreak arrived at the doors of his sister and fell at her feet, and wept out his tale of woe.

Thilakavathiyaar lovingly lifted her brother who had prostrated at her feet, applied with her own hands the sacred ash on his forehead, and led him to the presence of Lord Civan in the temple at Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam.

CHAPTER 4

Appar's Plea

It is surprising that in the context of Appar going to study Jainism, and his woeful return to his sister, the following phrases have been used by Sekkizhaar: 'Our Lord did not bestow His Grace' and 'The Grace of God has now been restored to him,' for Sekkizhaar could not have been unaware of Maanikkavaachakar's two pronouncements. Maanikkavaachakar said, 'Hallowed be the feet of Him who does not desert my heart even for as long as it takes to wink' and 'It is not Your divine intent to part from me by even as much as the length of a piece of a barley-corn.' God never deserts man; it is the self-willed man who deserts God. In this context, Maanikkavaachakar confesses that while God stretched His hand to take hold of him, he eluded his grasp and ran away to some distance, and, perhaps, put out his tongue at God. We should remember these pronouncements of Maanikkavaachakar. When Appar was brought before God by his sister as an accused, he not only pleaded, 'Not Guilty', but also went further and declared that the case against him was a false one. His maiden song is sung in this vein, a song charged with outraged innocence and terrible suffering from the cruel colic:

This torturous colic
  which is worse than the throes of death,
    You do not eradicate;
I am not aware of wrongs many done by me.
O Lord astride the bull!

Ever and always, day and night, unremittingly,
have I been worshipping Your feet.
Defying diagnosis, this colic in the innermost recesses
of the intestines in my abdomen doubles me up
with pain;
endure this, I, Your slave, cannot,
O my Father abiding in the Veerattaanam
at Athikai on the banks of Kedilam.

Thirumurais, Vol. IV, decad 1, st 1.

This is only the first stanza of the first decad sung by Appar. In succeeding stanzas he declares:

'My heart I have ever reserved as an abode for You.'

'I do not know of any moment when I had remained
without thinking of You.'

'Perfidy like this of Yours I have never seen!
Here am I living with the single resolve
of being a slave unto You only;
but this colic burns me alive;
do graciously eradicate it.'

'From long ago I am Your devotee;
unaware of this You got angry with me
and have subjected me to this suffering.'

'Unmindful of the watchmen on the banks of the tank,
those who stood about urged me, saying,
"Get into the tank, swim, and find the depth."
Now I do not know the way
to the bank where my feet can stand firm.'

'Words like these I have never heard before.'

'I don't remember ever having forgotten,
to worship You with water, flower, and incense.

Thirumurais are hereinafter abbreviated to Tm.

'I do not know of any occasion
when I had forgotten to sing
melodious songs in Tamil.'

'I do not know of ever forgetting You
in the midst of good or evil days.'

'I do not know of ever forgetting to chant
Your name with my tongue.'

In such terms is couched the emphatic plea of 'Not Guilty' by Appar before the Most Supreme Court of Justice tempered by Mercy. What inference could we draw from this? After long searching of heart and deep meditation on this problem, I cannot but come to the conclusion that the opinion held in Tamilnadu for the last thirteen centuries that Appar was an apostate, is a most vile calumny.

In this context, the image of John the Baptist and Kumaareela Bhattar come to my mind. Even as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Lord Jesus Christ, I visualise Appar as the forerunner of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar. In my considered opinion, Appar entered the Jain Monastery, even as Kumaareela Bhattar entered the Buddhist Monastic Order, with the intent of learning all the secrets of that religion. Appar did not become a genuine convert to Jainism. He was not an apostate to Caivism. He entered the ranks of Jainism even as a spy in modern times insinuates himself into the very top echelons of the enemy, in this case, the Jain High Command. The colic, stated by Sekkizhaar to be a penalty for apostasy to Caivism, was, in my opinion, in reality, a just penalty paid for betrayal of the guru and his teachings. No matter that he was a guru of the Jains. This is an inexorable law as was proved in the case of Kumaareela Bhattar who buried himself right up to his neck in a mound of the husks of paddy which was then set fire to at the bottom. As the fire slowly smouldered and spread upwards, Kumaareela Bhattar disclosed to his disciples what he had learnt of Buddhism, which later enabled Adi Sankara in his crusade against Buddhism. Appar's cruel colic was the penalty he had to pay for the betrayal of the faith reposed in him by his guru, no matter he was a Jain

Unless we place this construction on the colic that afflicted him, his very first song in the sacred presence of Lord Civan in Adikai-Veerattaanam on the banks of the River Kedilam would be a tissue of lies and a worst example of bare-faced perjury.

Moreover, it could not have been but on the strength of his never failing loyalty to Lord Civan that Appar could defy the messengers sent by the Pallava King to summon him to the court. Otherwise, it would have been but an act of hollow bravado, for he spoke to the messengers in these terms:

Subject to any one We are not;
Death We do not fear;
In hell, tortures We shall not endure;
tremble We do not.
Exult We shall; disease We do not know;
submit We will not;
joy eternal is Our lot; sorrow is not for Us.
Becoming irredeemable slave
unto Sankaran of the distinction
of being never a subject to any one,
unto that King who has a ring of genuine conch
pendant from one ear,
We have arrived at His twin rosy feet
which resemble freshly picked blossoms.

Tm, Vol. IV, d. 98, st. 1

Furthermore, the conferment of the title of 'Naavukku-arasar' on Appar by Lord Civan immediately on hearing his very first song, a plea of 'Not Guilty' in the strongest terms possible, becomes untenable unless we take Appar's plea as absolutely true. A pardon is understandable, but not the conferment of a title of great honour by a judge on a criminal accused with one of the greatest crimes in the Criminal Code of the land.

Swift retribution followed. And just retribution it was according to the laws of all times, when betrayers are subjected to the most horrible forms of torture.

CHAPTER 5

Expiation

The myrmidons of the Pallava King arrested Appar and took him before the King, who was, probably, Narasimhavarma the First. The king took counsel with the High Priests of Jainism in his court, and they advised him to bury Appar in a kiln of lime-stones and set fire to the kiln. And so it was done.

Seated in the burning kiln, Appar meditated on the feet of Lord Civan and sang:

> Even like the flawless music of the *veena*,
> and the twilight moon,
> like the gentle zephyr from the south,
> and the just coming up early summer,
> like the pond hovered over by humming bees,
> is the sheltering shade of my Father,
> The Immanent Lord's twin feet.
>
> Tm, Vol. IV, d. st. 1.

When seven days later the kiln was opened Appar was found to be unharmed.

When the spiritual counsellors of the king saw Appar rise out of the lime-stone kiln unscathed and as fresh as if he had just come out of a shower-bath, they were aghast. So was the king who turned to them for further counsel. Now, they advised him to administer deadly poison to Appar. Which was done. And Appar quaffed the poison, saying to himself, 'Poison too will become Amrit (Nectar) to the devotees of our Lord.'

And so it turned out to be, for did not Lord Civan Himself aeons ago gather up in His hands and drink the poison which the Sea of Milk threw up when the devas and asuras churned the sea for amrit? It is no wonder then that to the Lord's genuine devotees also poison would be transformed into amrit. The counsellors and the king were struck dumb with consternation when they found Appar alive after drinking the deadly poison.

Again the king turned to his counsellors for further advice. They advised him to have a mad elephant trample Appar under its feet. And so it was done. Forthwith, Appar sang:

Powdery white fragrant ash and sandal paste
has He on his forehead,
a luminous moon and a precious gem
adorn His head,
a garment of lovely hide is His,
of the hue of living coral is His body.
Dharma, the famous rampant bull, is His mount,
a snake is flung across His broad chest,
He has the turbulent goodly Kedilam as His river,
That unique Person's protege are We;
there is nothing which We dread,
no dreadful thing can befall Us.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 2 st. 1.

The mad elephant knelt at Appar's feet and after saluting him with lifted trunk, it turned back furiously on the myrmidons of the king and on the assembled monks and wreaked havoc on them.

Baffled in all their attempts to kill Appar, and terror-struck that, if they did not destroy Appar, destruction would come upon them, they advised the king as a desparate measure to tie Appar to a huge column of granite stone and throw it into the sea. Which was done.

Undaunted in his courage, and, unshaken in his implicit faith in Lord Civan, Appar sang a decad on *Namacivaaya*, the Mystic Five Letters, the *Panchaakshara*. Exultingly he sang:

The Word (Om),
Our Succour,
The Vedas' Author,
The Effulgence,
The Being in Heaven,
His perfect feet, the Succour of golden hue,
if you worship with joined palms,
even if you are thrown into the sea
tied to a stone column,
the best Succour
Namachchivaaya turns out to be.

Tm. Vol. IV d. 11, st. 1

And truly enough, the Mystic Five Letters became a musical catalyst which transformed the stone column, without changing its outward appearance, into a very light object, like a wooden pillar, which forthwith floated on the surface of the sea, bearing Appar still tied to it, and drifted with the current of the sea waves and deposited him on the shores of the neighbouring Thiruppaathirippuliyoor.

The people of that village came running forward with joyous shouts of 'Hara-Hara' which rose to the vaults of Heaven and threatened to rend it. Appar accompanied them to the temple of Lord Civan where he prostrated before the Moorthi singing ecstatically:

Becoming to me mother and father
and those born along with me,
He, nevertheless, was pleased to create the three worlds;
moreover, the Succour to the heavenly ones
condescended to reside in my mind.
In Thiruppaathirippuliyoor,
To Us, His slave,
He was the unmanifested Succour.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 94, st. 1

From Thiruppaathirippuliyoor Appar proceeded to Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam.

Entering the temple, he stood in the presence of the same Lord before Whom not many days ago he had stood as an accused and had pleaded, 'Not Guilty'.

Describing the devotees of Lord Civan Sekkizhaar sang:

Wooden beads their necklace, *kandhai* their robe,
Their duty none other but God's service;
Full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing:
How can I describe their resoluteness?

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
Unique servitors of the Great Dancing Lord,
Men of age-long fame; how shall I
Here praise or sing their state?

Kandhai is a loin cloth worn round the waist and whose lower hem never reaches below the calf-muscle. The cloth was always white. Tamil saints, all the sixty three, whose biography Sekkizhaar has written, never wore an ochre cloth. Sekkizhaar could well have been describing Appar as he stood in the presence of Lord Civan at Athikai-Veerattaanam. We have but to add one item to the description by Sekkizhaar. Appar bore in his right hand a hoe with a long handle, very much as a soldier bears his rifle resting on his shoulders. With this tool he weeded out the tares and thorns growing on the pathway to and around the temple of Lord Civan in all the places he visited during his long life.

Standing before the presence of his Lord Civan, Appar began his mission with this song:

The Lord with the garland
    of fragrant *Koovila* blossoms,
the Lord of Veerattaanam,
    the Lord with the white bull,
the Lord adorned by snakes with spotted hoods,
the Lord worthy of praise by Vishnu
        who has the bird as his mount,
    and by the golden-coloured Brahma,
the glorious Father difficult to know,
the Lord abiding in Athikai,
the Lord on the banks of roaring River Kedilam—
Ah, foolish me, I derogatorily spoke of Him in the past!

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 3, st. 2

Thus he made his peace with his Lord, for God is not mocked, even in pretence. And Appar had so spoken when he masqueraded as a pious Jain Monk in the court of the Pallava King.

With this song begins the long Ministry of Appar, a ministry of no less than four decades, a few years of which were spent in the company of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar.

CHAPTER 6

The God of Appar

According to Caiva Siddhaantham, the Vedas are of general merit and the Aagamas are of special merit. While the Vedas are given their due place and honour, it is the Aagamas, however, which are the source and fountain-head of the philosophy of Caiva Siddhaantha. The Civa-Gnaana-Bhodham, the foundation on which the structure of the philosophy of Caiva Siddhaantha is constructed, is the quintessence of the Aagamas which according to Maanikkavaachakar, Lord Civan Himself, 'seated on the eternal mighty Mahendra Mountain, graciously created, and later expounded to Uma, His spouse.' The twelfth and the last aphorism—*sutra*—of Civa-Gnaana-Bhodham lays down:

> (Through the help of gnosis), get rid of that (aanava) malam which prevents you from uniting with the lovely blossom-like, yet strong feet, of the Lord. Fraternise with the devotees who have apprehended the Lord; and worship the guise of those who, to the detriment of delusion, are filled with 'gneyam' (i.e. the Known), and the temple as verily Haran Himself.

Therefore, to the Caiva Siddhaanthin, the temple is Lord Civan Himself, and the worship of the Deity enshrined in the temple is an indispensable feature of his religious life. It is for this reason that Tamilnadu abounds with thousands of temples, more than a hundred being situated in a single town.

To the Vedantin, the Advaithin, temple worship is not a must. The three fires, the rites and rituals prescribed in the Karma-

Kandas of the Vedas for his daily life, and the communal yang-nyas (oblations to the deities offered in the sacrificial fire) are sufficient, and he need not enter a temple for worship in the whole of his life.

Being a Caiva Siddhaanthin par excellence, Appar visited no less than 125 shrines of Lord Civan and worshipped Him with song and service. Nevertheless, his God could not be said to be the God with form and enshrined in a temple. William Law, a mystic who lived in England, said:

> Though God is everywhere present, yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of the soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, the inward faculties of understanding, will, and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from where all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or the bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity—I had almost said the infinity—of thy soul; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.

This 'God Within' is the God of Appar. He sings:

In my mind's core is He,
    (With His Feet) on my head is He,
in speech is He,
and in the hearts of the clan of devotees
        who sing with ardent lips of His feet only;
He stands head and shoulders above the heavenly ones,
beyond the seven spheres is He,
nevertheless, (here on earth) He is in the hilly regions
    rich with golden ore,
in the fragrant *Kondrai* flower is He,
He is in the mountains, within the fire is He,
    in the wind is He, within the clouds is He,
on top of Kailas is He, He of Kaalaththi,
He abides ever in me.

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 8, st. 5

To Appar, God was his every kind of kith and kin. He sings:

To me Father You are, Mother You are,
Master You are,
affectionate uncle and aunt You are,
compatible wife You are, glittering riches You are,
my clan, my kin, and my home town You are,
the things I enjoy and the creatures I ride on
You create,
and, becoming my Succour,
You make my heart renounce all these things.
This gold You are, this precious gem You are,
this pearl You are,
my God You are,
my precious One mounted on the bull You are.

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 95, st. 1

Normally, to every human being in the Hindu fold, birth on earth is a curse and is to be got rid of. Nevertheless, Appar considers birth as a human being is worthwhile provided. . . . He sings:

The arched brows,
the budding smile on the rosy lips,
the matted locks cooled by the Ganga,
the milk-white ash on the coral-red body,
and the sweet-tasting lifted golden foot,
if one could but have a vision of these,
even birth as a human being
on this great earth is desirable.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 81, st. 4

Appar commands every one of his organs and limbs to worship and adore this God. He sings:

O Head mine!
Bow down to the Head (of all the universe)
Who, wearing a chaplet of heads[1] on His head
receives alms in a head;[2]

1,2. Skulls.

O Head minc, bow down to Him.

O Eyes mine! Behold Him—
with the throat
which swallowed the sea-spawned poison—
the Lord who eternally dances
swinging rhythmically His eight arms;
O Eyes mine! Behold Him.

O Ears mine! Listen always
to the heroic exploits of Civan,
our King,
the Lord with a body
of the hue of red coral-like flame;
O Ears mine, listen!

O Nose mine! Inhale the fragrance
of the cremation-ground-dwelling Lord
with three eyes,
the spouse of the Dame (Uma)
who hangs upon His words;
O Nose mine! Inhale His fragrance.

O Mouth mine! note that you praise the Lord,
Who, donning the hide of the rutting elephant,
dances in the cremation-ground
where dwell the ghouls;
O Mouth mine, note that you praise Him.

O Heart mine! Meditate
on the Immaculate One
with the coiled-up golden locks,
the spouse of Uma of the cloud-capped Mount;
O Heart mine! Meditate on Him.

O Hands mine! Join together
and worship the Transcendent Being—
Who has as a waist band a snake
with a poisonous mouth—
and strew at His feet

large quantities of fragrant flowers;
O Hands mine! Join together and worship Him.

Of what profit is this body to me—
    this body which does not walk clock-wise
      round Haran's temple
    and, lavishly strewing flowers with the hand,
    does not cry out,
                    'Obeisance to You'?
Of what profit is this body to me?. . . .

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 9. sts. 1 to 8

CHAPTER 7

The Mission of Appar

In sixththeq century A.D., Jainism had gained a strong hold in Tamilnadu with the support of the Pallava Kings who had themselves been won over to that faith. Jainism whose chief tenet is *Ahimsa*—not harming any creature in any the least manner—became a proselytising religion using methods of coercion, including destruction of temples of Caivism. The crusade launched by Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar was not due to the hatred of the Jains or Jainism in its true form but against the violent and iconoclastic practices of the Jain monks of those days.

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar's father, deeply disturbed in his heart at the state of the religious affairs in the country, prayed God for a son who would put an end to the humiliation of Sanaathana Dharma and restore it to its ancient glory. And God bestowed such a son on Hrudhaya-paadhar. Even from his third year, this holy child began his mission. For in the very first song sung by him at the age of three, he sang:

With the stupid Jains along with Buddhists
speaking slanderously of him,
and flinging unrighteous similar abusive words at Him,
the Thief of my heart begged his way around the world,
with the hide of a mad elephant
wrapped round his body.
What a mystery is this!
Seems to me He is a mad man—
this Lord here abiding in Brahmapuram!

Tm. Vol. 1, d. 1, st. 10.

Appar came, as has been said before, as a fore-runner to Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar. The mission of Appar, was, therefore, to tour all or most of the shrines of Lord Civan on the north and the south banks of the River Cauvery, and also in other parts of Tamilnadu, and either to prepare the people for the coming of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar after him or to visit such places after Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and consolidate the position gained by Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar's crusade.

Appar was the victim of the most cruel persecution by the Jains with the active support of the king. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that Appar's 3000 and odd stanzas contain very little condemnation of the Jains, and in the rare instances of such reference, they are very moderate in language. Appar refers only on two occasions directly to his persecution by being thrown into the sea tied to a column of granite stone. Even here the reference is not so much to the suffering endured by him as to the great mercy of God. One of these references has been mentioned earlier. The other reference is in the following song:

> On the Jains tying me to a stone column
> and throwing me into the sea with indecent haste,
> I chanted with my lips
> the name of the Lord in Neelakkudi
> of rows and rows of paddy fields,
> and escaped therefrom.
>
> Tm. Vol V, d. 72, st. 7

Appar was more concerned about his mission—the renaissance of Sanaathana Dharma—than about recounting the bitter memories of his persecution.

CHAPTER 8

The First Pilgrimage

Taking leave of his sister and Lord Civan abiding in Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam, Appar began his first round of pilgrimages to the shrines of Civan in Tamilnadu.

He worshipped at the neighbouring Thiruvennainalloor and from there went to Aamaththoor, Thirukkovaloor and several other shrines and finally arrived at Pennaakadam.

We may mention, in passing, that, from the account of Appar's life by Sekkizhaar, it is learnt that Appar never came back to Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam or his sister. There is a difference between the several rounds, as many as six, of pilgrimages made by Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and those made by Appar. After each round of pilgrimages, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar returned to Seekaazhai, his birth-place; but Appar's pilgrimages were one long tour from the time he left Thiruvathikai-Veerattaanam to his arrival in Thiruppukaloor in his eighty-first year when he merged in the Lord abiding in the shrine, and gained *mukti.*

At Pennaakadam, he stood in the presence of Lord Civan abiding in the temple which went by the name of Thoongaanai-Maadam, and made a petition to the Lord:

> To the golden-hued holy feet of Yours,
>   I have a humble petition to make.
> If it is Your pleasure to save the life
>   of this slave who is ever engaged in worshipping You,
> O Tender Flame, Who abide in Thoogaanai-Maadam

at Kadanthai overcast by heavy clouds,
do brand me with the sign
of the three-pronged spear of lightning speed,
so that the slander against me
is wiped out.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 109, st. 1.

This petition makes us infer that, in the very first lap of his pilgrimage, Appar encountered adverse criticism and slanderous accusations of apostasy and re-apostasy. For, even like his own sister and centuries later, Sekkizhaar, the contemporaries of Appar also believed that he was an apostate. Which he was not. His petition was graciously accepted and, without any one around him knowing the least about it, a Civa-bhootham—one of the cortege of Lord Civan—branded on his shoulders the sign of the spear and the rampant bull, the mount of Lord Civan.

It must be noted that this is an extraordinary proceeding in response to an extraordinary request, for no Caivite saint before or after Appar had made such an appeal or had been so branded. In fact, it is not at all the custom among Caivites to be branded. Only the Vaishnavites, both man and married woman, have themselves branded on the arms with the sign of the conch and the disc. This branding is done by a guru and is called *Samaasrayanam*. Therefore, Appar's appeal to be branded with the trident is unique in the history of worshippers of Lord Civan in Tamilnadu. This request, therefore, must have arisen from the suspicious and questioning looks cast on him by the people in the shrines he visited on his first pilgrimage.

From Pennaakadam Appar went to Araththurai, Thirumuthukundram—literally, the Sacred Ancient Hill, now known as Viruddhaachalam—and other places, and arrived at Thillai, now known as Chidambaram.

Thillai is the seat of the Akaasa-lingam, and has a glory all its own, unrivalled by the glory of any other shrine of Lord Civan in Tamilnadu. Here Appar ecstatically danced and sang. Sekkizhaar describes his appearance thus:

The hands were clasped above the head
in gesture of adoration,
the eyes, like unceasing down-pour of rain,

were streaming with tears,
the mind and its instruments of knowledge
melted with boundless love,
and the blessed body fell down on the ground
and rose again and again.
The ardour of Appar,
as he stood in the presence of the Lord
Who was dancing unceasingly, with His matted locks
swaying rythmically with the movements of the dance,
knew no bounds

T. st. 167

Here Appar sang many decads; for instance, he sang:

I am incapable of singing like a devotee,
O transcendent One! O perfect Yogi!
Then how shall I pay homage to You?
But, do not, on that account, slight me.
O Ancient One, O Primordial Lord,
O Father Who dance on the Hall of Gnosis in Thillai,
to witness Your dance, this slave has come.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 23, st. 1

The unique One,
He Who is the Object of contemplation by ascetics,
the Core of the Vedas, the Atom,
He of a quality never known to any one,
The Honey, the Milk, the Effulgent Light,
the King of the devas,
and, moreover, a greater One than Vishnu or Brahma,
He Who is Immanent in the fire, in the wind,
in the roaring sea, and the ranges of mountains,
the Lord abiding in Perumpattra-p-puliyoor—
all the days passed without talking of Him
are days on which We did not live.

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 1., st. 1.

Appar tore himself away from the presence of the beloved Dancing Lord and made his way to Thirukkazhippaalai. Here, in terms of loving Bridal Mysticism, Appar sang a song throb-

bing with pent-up love. The song is supposed to be sung by the companion of a love-stricken maiden.

Opening her coral lips, since she says,
 'O Lord of the heavenly ones!'
since she says,
 'the Lord with the stripes of white ash which shine
  on the hefty shoulders of bright red coral hue,'
since she says, 'the Lord with Her
 of swan-like gait and lovely girdle,
  the Lord Who is farthermost than the farthermost,'
I wonder whether she saw Him
 Who abides in Kazhippaalai
  where the sea throws on the shore
   a multitude of corals.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 6, st. 1

The journey to Thirukkazhippaalai was only an interlude in Appar's visit to Thillai. He retraced his steps to Thillai and the Dancer Whom he could not forget. He sang:

He Who stripped the hide
 of the elephant with a palmyra-like trunk
  and three exudations,
He Who makes
 the minds of those who meditate on Him,
  His shrine,
He Who takes many forms,
 the Dancer on the Hall of Gnosis—
would I ever survive if I forget Him
 even for as much as the fraction of a second.

Tm. Vol. V, d. 2, st. 1

While he thus spent his days in Thillai, he heard from other devotees gathered thereat about a young child who was fed verily with the milk from the breast of the Mother of all creation. Their praise aroused in him a great desire to go and see this wonderful child. Straightaway he left Thillai and wended his way to Thiruppukali, one of the twelve names for Seekaazhai, the birth-place of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar.

CHAPTER 9

The Meeting of 'Father' and 'Son'

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar had completed his fourth round of pilgrimage to the shrines of Lord Civan. His first round was one in name only, for, after he had sung his maiden song at Seekaazhai, and had worshipped the Lord abiding in the temple at his birth-place, he visited the neighbouring Kolakka, riding on the shoulders of his father, and after singing at that shrine the praises of Lord Civan, he returned to Seekaazhai. His next round of pilgrimage was of short duration, covering 10 shrines only. A third tour of just three shrines was followed by a fourth tour of twenty shrines. On his return to Seekaazhai he was invested with the sacred thread. He must have been in his seventh or eighth year on that occasion.

Almost immediately Appar arrived at Seekaazhai. Sekkizhaar describes Appar arriving at Seekaazhai in these words:

Surrounded by a throng of devotees,
Thiru-naavukku-arasar,
of form smeared with sacred ash,
of palms joined in obeisance,
of compassion within pouring out as tears
and making the onlookers' minds thaw and melt—
he who gained the shore on a stone
which floated on the sea—
arrived at Thiruppukali,[1] birth-place of the saint

1. Another name for Seekaazhai.

who uttered in boon-conferring Tamil
the written Vedas[1]

T. st. 180

On hearing that Naavukkarasar had arrived, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, saying to himself, 'This is the fruit of the good deeds performed by me in the past', went forward surrounded by his retinue to receive Appar. He saw before him a unique personality which Sekkizhaar describes thus:

An unremitting love-filled mind,
a body vibrating with pent-up ecstasy
Kandhai (loin cloth),
which seemed an excessive clothing,
wound round his waist,
a hoe as a tool held aloft in his hand,
a rain of streaming tears pouring from his eyes,
sacred ash radiant on his form,
in such eternal holy guise
(a guise reminding one of Lord Civan Himself)
Appar appeared before Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar.

T. st. 270

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, with palms joined in worship,
approached Appar;
and Appar, with welling love, went forward,
making his way through the retinue
surrounding Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar,
and with flawless great love fell at his feet.
Forthwith, the child, who summoned with his weeping
the Lord Who comes riding on a bull,
took hold of the hands of him who had fallen at his feet
with his blossom-like hands
impossible to paint in words,
lifted him up, and prostrating before him in turn,
lovingly hailed him 'Appare!' (O Daddy),
to which Appar responded,
'Your humble slave am I!'

T. st. 182

1. The Tamil *Thirumurais*

And from that day to this day, he who was named at birth as Marulneekkiyaar, and who, on his singing his maiden song, was honoured by Lord Civan Himself with the title 'Naavukkarasar'—King of Speech—is known, in Tamilnadu and in all places where people from Tamilnadu live, by the name of 'Appar'. And so he will be known as long as Tamil survives, that is, to the end of the world. And Appar rejoiced that he could worship the feet of the Child, and the Child in turn rejoiced that he had had an opportunity to worship the feet of Appar, and both were seized with a great desire to worship the feet of the Lord seated in the holy boat afloat the flood waters, and entered His temple. There, in the presence of the Lord, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar turning to Appar, said 'O Appar! Do sing the praises of Your Lord', And Appar sang:

On the day the sea engulfed everything in the world,
  they say, four and five birds bore aloft
    Your feet.
Other than being a slave
  unto Him abiding in Kazhumalam[1]
Who dances with His matted locks—
  in which are contained the cool moon
    and wind-tossed Ganga—
      tossing about rhythmically,
could there be any other choice
  in the spacious world
    girt by the beautiful cool sea?

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 82, st. 1

Appar spent in this wise several days in the company of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, and later parted from him, moved by a desire to visit other shrines of Lord Civan on the land watered by the River Cauvery.

1. Kazhumalam—one of the twelve names of Seekaazhai.

CHAPTER 10

Thiruvadi-Deekshai

Initiation into a spiritual society by a guru is of several kinds. The initiation is called *Deekshai*. There is *Nayana-Deekshai*—initiation by casting a gracious glance on the novice; there is *Sparsa-Deekshai*—touching the body of the novice by the guru with his hand or any other part of his body; there is the *Deekshai* by imparting to the novice a *Mantra*, and there is the *Thiruvadai-Deekshai*—the guru placing his foot on the head of the novice.

In the case of St. Maanikkavaachakar, St. Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, and Appar, Lord Civan Himself conferred *Thiru-vadi Deekshai*. Maanikkavaachakar himself has recorded this incident in his life. He sings, '(I can tell you about) the manner in which the Lord placed the imprint of His foot on my head in Thiruvidaimaruthoor.' It is an interesting story in the case of St. Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal. Sekkizhaar relates this incident thus:

At about the hour
when the sun with the sky-traversing lofty chariot
drawn by the green steed
was about to sink into the western sea,
he (Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal)
came to the outskirts of Thiruvathikai.
Saying: 'I fear to tread with my feet
and enter this great city
where God-owned (Thirunaavukk) arasu,

the saint praised by the world—
the bearer of the hoe—
loved to perform with his hands
service to the Lord on the bull,'
he entered the Ciththavatamatam
situated beyond the cool fields
fed by the sluices.

In that *matam*
surrounded by flower gardens teeming with bees,
Vanthondar[1], with mind filled with love
unto the Lord of Veerattaanam
north of the River Kedilam
of billowing waters,
entered his bed,
while his teeming retinue
also went to sleep around him.
Seeing this,
the lovely-eyed Lord abiding in Veerattam
entered the *matam* common to all,
without anyone knowing beforehand,
in the form of an old brahmin,
and, placing his lotus feet
on the sacred flower-decked head of Sundaramoorthi,
pretended to be asleep on His bed.
Aarooran[2], sensing this state of affairs, said,
'Oh Vedic Brahmin,
You have placed your feet on my head.'
To this, He graciously replied:
'It was done without knowing the direction;
You see, it is on account of my old age.'
Tamilnaathan[3] accepting this explanation
placed his head farther away
and went to sleep.

On the brahmin stretching his feet again

1. Vanthondar, contentious devotee; a name given by Lord Civan to Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal.
2,3. Other names for Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal.

even there on to his head,
the Lord of Thirunaavaloor[1]
saying: 'What is this?
You have kicked me many times!',
asked 'Who are you?'
The Lord who has hidden the Ganga in His locks
replied, 'Have you not known yet?',
and vanished instantly.

Sekkizhaar—Thaduththu-aatkonda-puraanam, st. 83 to 87.

In recent times, in the 19th century, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa gave *Thiruvadi-Deekshai* to Narendra, who later became the world famous Vivekananda, who himself describes the experience in these words:

I found him alone, sitting on his small bed. He was glad to see me, and called me affectionately to sit near him on one side of the bed. But a moment later I saw him convulsed with some emotion. His eyes were fixed upon me, he muttered under his breath, and drew slowly nearer. I thought he was going to make some eccentric remark as on the previous occasion. But before I could stop him, he had placed his right foot on my body. The contact was terrible. With my eyes open I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling and vanishing into nothingness. . . . The whole universe and my own individuality were at the same time almost lost in a nameless void, which swallowed up everything that is. I was terrified, and believed I was face to face with death. I could not stop myself from crying out: 'What are you doing? I have parents at home. . . ' Then he began to laugh, and passing his hand over my breast, he said: 'All right. Let us leave it at that for the moment! It will come, all in good time.' He had no sooner said these words than the strange phenomena disappeared. I came to myself again, and everything both outside and inside was as before.

It is no wonder that Appar yearned for *Thiruvadi-Deekshai.*

1. Another name or Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal.

Therefore, after taking leave of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, Appar paid his homage to Lord Civan in various shrines and arrived at Thiruchchatthimuttram; entering the temple therein, he stood before the Lord and prayed with tears in his eyes.

O Lord! Before Death of valiant might hurries
in anger to kill me,
do indelibly inscribe
the imprint of Your blossomy feet on my head;
if, however, You abandon me to my fate,
ineradicable infamy
which will totally eclipse Your good fame
will come upon You,
O Lord with the hand bearing a roaring fire,
O Tongue of Flame Who is Civan,
abiding in Thiruchchatthimuttram!

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 96, st. 1.

On his making this petition, he was bidden by the Lord to come to Nalloor. And there Appar went. He entered the temple and prostrated before the Lord, and, as he was rising up, Lord Civan said: 'We fulfil your desire,' and forthwith adorned the crown of the head of Appar with His blossom feet. Appar stood up overcome with joy and sang:

He made the devotees, whose hearts melt
with remembrance of Him, thaw furthermore;
He made evil karma flee,
not standing on the order of its going;
He used as a shawl
the hide of the elephant of mounting rage;
He wore on His head
the tender shoot of the waxing moon;
and when the clan of devas came in large numbers
searching for His feet
and prostrated before Him at close quarters,
the twin blossoms opened their petals
and, squirting honey, wetted the jewelled crowns
of the devas.
Such glorious holy feet He planted on my head—

my Lord of Nalloor—most perfectly.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 14, st. 1.

It may be mentioned in passing that Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar never received *Thiruvadi-Deekshai*, or, for that matter, any other kind of *Deekshai*. He did not stand in need of any *Deekshai*; for he was a soul who had already integrated with the Godhead but had deliberately taken birth on earth to execute a mission of God. He was not born as a fruit of past karma. He was an *Eeswara-Koti*, a term which Ramakrishna Paramahamsa uses to indicate such persons.[1]

1. See *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

CHAPTER 11

Appar and His Admirer

Appar proceeded on his pilgrimage, and visited some more shrines. But his thoughts were always on Nalloor and his heart melted with remembrance of the benediction gained thereat.

He arrived at Thingaloor and, on the outskirts of the town, he came across a water-booth, and, to his surprise, found the booth named after him, with banners bearing his name adorning all sides of the booth. He asked one of the bystanders, 'Who has given this name to this booth and set it up here?' He received a reply which amazed him. The bystander said, 'Appoothi Adikal of ineffable merit erected this booth and named it after Arasu; not only that, all the surrounding streets, tanks, groves, in fact, everything, without omission, he has named after Appar.' Hearing this, Appar wondered 'What is the idea!', and, turning to the man who stood by him asked him, 'Where does he live?' He was told, 'The gentleman with the sacred thread adorning his chest belongs, verily, to this ancient town. A little while ago he went to his house; that too is not far off, it is quite near.'

Appar left that place and arrived at the doors of the owner of the booth. Appoothi Adikal, the chief of the Brahmins of Thingaloor, hearing that a devotee of our Lord had come to his door, came out to receive him. Hurrying near Appar, he prostrated at his feet. And to Appar, who had prostrated at the other's feet even before his body touched the ground, he said, 'Indeed, I seem to have done incalculable thapas in the past; O Sir, who bestow your grace even before it is sought for,

what has brought you to my door?' Appar answered, 'We have just come from worshipping the Lord at Thiruppazhanam. On my way I saw the booth you have set up, and heard of the other charities you are performing, and have therefore come to you. What is the reason of your not calling the water-booth by your name and, instead, naming it after some one else?' The Brahmin, deeply hurt in his mind on hearing this, said, 'You have not done a gracious thing.' He grew angry and continued, 'Some one else's name! Is that the way you style the sacred name of him who, by the strength of his devotion to the Lord, won against the conspiracy of the king who had joined the chaff of the land?' Furthermore he said, 'Is there any one in all the multitude of worlds created by our Lord who does not know the greatness of him who reached the shores of the sea on a raft of stone floating on the boiling sea?' He continued 'How could you, who bear this spiritual guise, say such words? Where do you reside? And, who, indeed, are you? Tell me!'

Appar in humble words introduced himself as he who had been afflicted by the colic and who had been graciously taken back into the fold. On hearing this, Appoothi Adikal with palms joined above his head and tears streaming from his eyes, inarticulate words issuing out of his mouth, and with the hair on his body standing up on account of pent-up emotion, fell down at the feet of Appar. Appar in turn prostrated at the feet of Appoothi Adikal who, rejoicing like a man who has regained his wealth which he had totally lost, danced, ran about, sang, and acted like a man mad with ecstatic joy.

He invited Appar to his house, and asked his wife to prepare a meal quickly for one who was to him no less than God himself. And such a meal Appoothi Adikal's wife prepared, and sent her only son to the garden to fetch a plantain leaf on which she could serve the food for the guest.

The boy, immensely pleased that he had been sent on this errand, ran into the garden, and, selecting a very fine mature leaf, began cutting it when a snake hidden at the stem of the leaf bit his hand. He saw the snake, realised what had happened to him, and, intent on carrying out his errand before the poison killed him, ran with the leaf in his hand to his mother, and, even as she took over the leaf, fell down in a swoon. The mother, saw his body turn black with the poison and noted

the punctures made by the fangs of the snake. She rolled the body in a mat, carried the bundle to the back door, set it down, came back with not a sign on her face of the tragedy that had come upon the family, took her husband aside, whispered into his ear what had happened and, at his suggestion, began serving the food to the guest as if nothing had happened. Appoothi Adikal invited Appar to come and take his meal.

Appar followed, and called Appoothi Adikal and his wife and their children, and graciously applied with his own hand the sacred ash on their foreheads. Seeing the eldest son missing, he asked the parents to call him as well so that he could bless him also by applying the ash on his forehead. With a little perturbation showing on their hitherto calm faces, they said, 'He is not available now.' Appar noted the perturbation on their faces and said, 'Tell me the truth!' Compelled by their duty to speak the truth ever and always, with great hesitation and sorrow that a hindrance to entertaining their holy guest had arisen, they related in detail what had happened.

On hearing what they had done, he praised them saying, 'Fine indeed is your behaviour! Who else on earth would ever do a thing like this?' Saying so, he followed the parents to where the dead child had been hidden, and sang a decad of entreaty to Lord Civan to restore the child to life. He sang:

One is His mountain
    to which our thoughts ascend,
One is the waxing moon which He wears,
One is the bleached skull in His hand
    in which alms are served by His devotees,
One is the mount on which He rides.

Two are the feet adored by the heavenly ones,
Two is He—Male and Female—
    with a ring and a roll of palm-leaf on the ears,
Two are His forms—
    the formless and that with form,
Two are the deer and the mace
    which took refuge in Him

Three are His eyes—
    including the one on His forehead,
Three are the prongs of His spear,
Three are the bow, the bow-string, and the arrow,
Three are the fortresses which He shot at.

Four are His faces,
Four are the sources of birth,
    the egg, the sweat, the earth, the uterus,
Four are the feet of His mount,
Four are the Vedas sung by Him.

Five are the hoods of His swaying snake,
Five are the senses which He overcomes,
Five are the arrows of him[1]
    who was the object of His anger,
Five are the things[2]
    with which He has His bath.

Six are the branches of knowledge He created,
Six are the faces of His son,
Six are the feet of the bee on His garland,
Six are the tastes[3] in the food served to Him.

Seven are the genus[4] created by Him
    after each cataclysm,
Seven are the vast seas made by Him,
Seven are the worlds ruled by Him,
Seven are the notes of music designed by Him.

Eight are His inseparable qualities,
Eight are the kinds of the flowers He wears,
Eight are His arms,
Eight are the cardinal points ordained by Him.

1. Cupid.
2. The five things yielded by a cow: milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung.
3. Pungent, sour, salty, sweet, bitter, and astringent.
4. Devas, human beings, beasts, birds, creeping insects, creatures living in water, and plants.

Nine are the outlets He designed
for a human body,
Nine are the strands on the thread
across His chest,
Nine are the plaits
of His lovely matted locks,
Nine are the continents
He created in the universe.

Ten are the eyes in His (five-hooded) snakes,
Ten are the fangs of His (five-hooded) snakes,
Ten are the heads of the object[1] of His anger,
which were crushed till their ten sets of teeth
cracked into pieces.
Ten are the experiences of the soul
in its spiritual progress.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 18, st. 1 to 10

Thus Appar extolled the greatness of Lord Civan, and concluded with a description of the snakes adorning the body of the Lord, thus transforming his song into a spell to bring the dead child to life. Moreover, the counting of one to ten acted as a device to give time for the spell to act.

His entreaty was heard, and the dead boy rose from the mat as if he had just then woken up after a refreshing sleep.

After due rites had been performed to cleanse the house of the pollution resulting from harbouring a corpse, Appar was again invited to take his food. When it was served, he asked Appoothi Adikal and his children to join him and take food with him, which they did. With great reluctance on both sides, Appoothi Adikal and Appar parted company, and Appar went back to Thiruppazhanam.

1. Ravana.

CHAPTER 12

The 'Child' and 'Father' Again

After taking leave of Appoothi Adikal, Appar set out again on his pilgrimage. And, in due course, arrived at Thiruvaaroor. It was here that Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal was obliged to sing the eleven stanzas going under the name of *Thiruththondaththo-kai*, in which he has listed the names of the saints of Tamilnadu before him, in so far as he knew them. This list is the source of inspiration and guidance to Sekkizhaar for writing his hagio-graphy. Sekkizkaar picturesquely describes Appar as he stood in the presence of Lord Thiyaagaraaja abiding in Kamalaalayam, the famous temple in Thiruvaaroor.

A holy form whose chest was drenched
by a down-pour of rain of tears,
a holy mouth from which issued
in dulcet voice garlands woven of sweet Tamil,
a holy mind dedicated to the red golden feet,
a unique tool in the form of a hoe,
a personality constituted by these parts,
Appar went about cleaning the streets
that the world may prosper,
and humbly adorned the Lord with his songs.

T. st. 225

Thus standing in the presence of the devotees assembled in the Devaasiriyan (Assembly Hall of the Jeevanmuktas in flesh and spirit) Appar sang:

Abandoning the worship of the feet of the Lord
Whose body is smeared all over with the milk-white ash,
and thinking that I could improve myself,
I wandered about holding a pot-carrier in my hand.
Abandoning the whole-hearted worship with my hands
of the Lord of Aaroor—
where peacocks dance to the song of the Kuyil
nesting in the groves laden with blossoms
which had never been plucked by any one's hands—
I have become a thief who robbed an orchard
of its raw astringent fruit
while ripe fruit was available.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 5, st. 1

Reluctantly leaving Thiruvaaroor, Appar proceeded on his pilgrimage, and, after visiting some more shrines, he made his way to Thiruppukaloor, moved by a great desire to worship the feet of Lord Civan abiding in the temple therein. At the same time, Thiru-gnaana-sabandhar arrived at the outskirts of Thiruppukaloor and took his abode in the mutt of Murukanaar, one of the sixty three saints sung by Sekkizhaar. On the previous occasion when Appar met Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, he was a lone pilgrim. Now he was surrounded by a host of devoted followers. Sekkizhaar, describing the meeting and the merging of the band of devotees of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and that of Appar, sings thus:

When the surging mass of devotees
smeared from head to foot with the sacred ash
came from both sides and merged into each other,
it seemed as if two moon-lit seas
ran into each other and became one.

T. st. 233

When both the saints had paid their respects to each other, they entered Pukaloor. Answering the queries of the Child, Appar described the glory of Thiruvaaroor, and the Child, impelled by a desire to visit Thiruvaaroor, set out thereto, while Appar entered Thiruppukaloor and, staying there, visited a few shrines of Lord Civan in the neighbourhood. When the

Child returned from Aaroor, both set out on a pilgrimage and arrived at Thiruveezhimizhalai, which was then in the grip of a famine. Sekkizhaar says:

The world all over was smitten with famine
and the people suffered;
in those days of misery,
the Lord Who bears a deer and a mace in His hands
appeared in a dream
to the Child and to Arasar,
and thuswise the Lord of russet locks,
abiding in Thiruveezhimizhalai,
bestowed His grace on them.

idem. st. 256

'Though you would not, of course, be distressed
in your minds by the conditions of the times,
Yet We bestow on you this
that you may bestow it in turn
on those who worship you.'
Saying so, He placed a coin before each of them
as a famine-relief dole,
and disappeared from their vision
even while they were watching
His guise and form.

idem, st. 257

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and Appar, each of them, received a coin which they delivered to their followers to buy provisions. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar's followers were daily late in bringing the provisions. On being asked the reason for the delay, they said:

'We do not understand
anything about this.
When we go to buy all our needs
with the coin which you received
from Him Who owns you,
the shopkeepers say that we should exchange
the coin at the coin-changers

for a current coin
whereas the coin got by Vaakeesar
they receive with pleasure.
This is the reason for the delay.

Sekkizhaar, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, st. 568

On hearing this, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar thought,
'Among the coins given by the Lord Civan to us,
one has to be exchanged at a discount,
and the other is good
and is free from discount;
that is because the other coin has been obtained
by the devoted service of Thirunaavukkarasar
of great skill in speech.
I shall therefore sing the praises
of the Great One
that the coin given in future to me
may also be free of discount.'

idem, st. 569

And he sang:

Free of discount,
do in future bestow a coin,
O Lord of Mizhalai the Spotless!
No blame will there be in doing so.
O Lord who are our King!
O Lord of Mizhalai
which contains the Vedas,
instead of this coin with a stigma,
do graciously bestow a proper coin.

Tm. Vol. I, d. 92, st. 1-2

And the Lord granted the wish, and from that day Sambandhar also received a current coin.

Taking leave of the Lord in Thiruveezhimizhalai, the Father and the Child proceeded on their pilgrimage and arrived at Thirumaraikkaadu which today goes by the name of Vedaaranyam. The doors to the temple therein had been closed by th

Four Vedas long long ago; no one had been able to open them again. Since the closing of the main doors, people were entering the temple by a side entrance. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and Appar came up to the main entrance to the temple and stood before it. They were loath to enter by the side door. The Child turned to the Father and said 'Do sing a song to open the doors,' and Appar sang:

O spouse of Uma,
    Her with speech equalling music!
O Lord of Maraikkaadu
    most loved by You on earth!
That we may see You with our eyes,
    do graciously open the doors wide apart.

Tm. Vol. V, d. 10, st. 1

Appar continued to sing stanza after stanza but the doors still remained closed. Now Appar in chagrin sang:

O You Lord Who with Your toe
    crushed the Raakshasa!
Not the least pity have you!
    O You Who are our Lord!
O Lord abiding in Maraikkaadu
surrounded by *punnai* trees dripping with honey!
Do instantly open these doors!

idem, st. 11

And the doors opened. Father and Child went in and worshipped the Lord to their hearts' content. Coming out, Appar now turned to Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and said, 'You sing now and close the door.' And Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar sang:

O brave Knight Who abide in Maraikkaadu,
    surrounded by groves dripping with honey,
where the Four Vedas themselves
    adore You singing Your praises!
Do immediately bestow a gracious favour here and now
    and, for my sake, will that this doo may close itself.

Even before the Child could finish this first stanza of a long decad of eleven stanzas, the doors closed with a bang. Appar, who witnessed this, and also remembered that it had taken all the eleven stanzas of his decad and also an accusation of lack of pity to make the Lord reluctantly open the door, was filled with a sense of grievance and he went to bed still harbouring his grievance.

And to him, in his sleep, the Lord appeared with Uma His Spouse and commanded him, 'We will be in Vaaimoor, come after Us there.' And to Vaaimoor Appar went, and, before him, guiding him, went the Lord in the same guise in which He had appeared to Appar in his dream. Appar followed the Lord a long distance but could never overtake Him. Then, the Lord, as if He desired to confer a vision without further delay, pointed out to Appar a temple in front of Him, and, with Appar hurriedly following Him, He entered the temple.

Hearing about Appar's departure, Sambandhar also went there. Appar stood in the temple and appealed to the Lord:

'You beckoned me, and, seeming to be quite close to me, You have disappeared. This may be deserving of me who, without understanding Your intent, forcibly opened the door; but he who sang to close the door with his song is here beside me. How could You hide Yourself from him?' And then the Lord bestowed the vision on the Child as well. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar pointed out the vision to Appar and thereupon Appar sang:

I beheld the devotees sing and adore Him!
I beheld the cortege of His devotees!
I heard the reverberation of the drums
    as the crowding ghouls danced!
I beheld the beautiful hand bearing the fire!
    I beheld Goddess Ganga in His matted locks
      adorned by the snake and the kaanthal blossom!
I beheld on His head the feather of the Crane!
    The Kondrai I beheld!
Bleached skull in his hand I beheld!
    This is the manner I beheld the Lord of Vaaimoor!

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 77, st. 1

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and Appar returned to Thirumarik-

kaadu. While they abode there serving the Lord each in his own way, some messengers, sent by Kulachchiraiyaar the Chief Minister and Mangayarkkarasiyaar, the Queen of the Paandiyan King, came to see Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar. They related to him the atrocities done in the name of religion by the Jain Monks under the patronage of the King, and Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar decided to proceed immediately to Paandinadu. On hearing this decision, Appar, who was with him said:

O Son! There is no limit
to the cunning of the Jain Monks,
I have something to tell you,
the stars are also inauspicious;
it is not desirable
that you should prepare to go there.

Sekkizhaar, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, st. 65

The Child replied:
If it is true that we worship
the feet of our Lord,
no mishap will befall us.
Saying so,
the Chief of Pukali
paid homage to the rosy fragrant blossomy feet
of the Transcendent Being,
and proclaimed his credo
in the song beginning with the phrase,
'Veyuru tholi'.

idem, st. 616

He sang:
The Partner of Her with arms smooth like a bamboo,
He with the throat which had swallowed the poison,
He Who caresses the excellent *veena*,
He Who wears on His head
the spotless moon and the Ganga,
since He has entered my heart,
the Sun, the Moon, Mars,
Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn,
and the Snakes Two,

blemishlessly good, good indeed are they,
good, exceedingly good to devotees they are.

Tm. Vol. II, d. 85, st. 1

Since He, Lord Civan,
with bones, the boar's tusk,
and the tortoise shell dangling on His chest,
since He Who with His Consort comes
mounted on a bull,
and is adorned with the golden garland
of datura flowers and the Ganga,
since He has entered my heart,
Aayilyam, the ninth star from Asvini the first,
the ninth from the first, Makam,
the ninth from the seventh, Visaakam,
Kettai, the eighteenth,
Thiruvaadhirai, the sixth,
and the rest, namely,
Bharani, Kaarthikai, Pooram, Chitrai,
Swaathi, Pooraadam, Poorattaathi,
all these are lovingly good, good indeed, very good,
exceedingly good to the devotees of Lord Civan.

idem, st. 2

On seeing that the Child was determined to go to Paandinadu, Appar offered to accompany him. But the Child firmly bade the Father to stay back, and went alone to Paandinadu.

Appar stayed a few more days in Thirumaraikkaadu, and then, drawn by a desire to worship again the rosy feet of the Lord abiding in Thiruveezhimizhalai, he proceeded there.

CHAPTER 13

A Long Trek

Appar had, in the company of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, traversed a territory from Thiruambar in Peralam Taluk of Thanjavoor District to Thirumaraikkaadu on the south coast of Tamilnadu, and then to Vaaimoor, a distance of 69 kilometres and back to Thirumaraikkadu where he parted from Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar who proceeded to Madurai along with the Queen and the Chief Minister of the Paandiyan King.

Deeply disturbed in heart at the perilous journey undertaken by a Child who had not, in all probability, entered his teens, but, nevertheless abiding by the will of God and the decision of the Child, Appar proceeded alone on a long pilgrimage which took him from Thirumaraikkaadu in the southern coast of Tamilnadu to Thirukkaallaththi, now in Andhra Pradesh, a trek which took him from the southern extremity of the district of Thanjavoor in the southern part of Tamilnadu through the North Arcot District to the Chingelput District and therefrom to what is at present Andhra Pradesh.

A few towns where Lord Civan had his abode had a special attraction for Appar. One of them was Thiruppukaloor and another was Thiruveezhimizhalai. During this trek, Appar went to Nagaippattinam, and thence to Thiruveezhimizhalai and from there through Thiruvaavaduthurai to Pazhaiyaarai. As he stood worshipping Lord Civan in the sanctum-sanctorum of the temple there, he was told that this was not the original genuine shrine and that the latter had been buried under a mound of earth and stones by the Jain Monks. Forthwith Appar decided to go on

a hunger strike till the original shrine was unearthed and he could worship the Lord. Lord Civan, disturbed by this resolve of Appar, appeared in the dream of the King of the land and said, 'We are there hidden by the fanatical Jain Monks,' and, indicating to him the landmarks, ordered him to have the original shrine unearthed.

The King woke up praising the Lord with palms joined together over his head, and acquainted his Ministers with what he had been commanded to do. Then he set out, accompanied by them, and, arriving where Appar was, he fell at his feet, and carried out the command of Lord Civan. Appar now worshipped Lord Civan abiding in the genuine shrine which had been excavated by the efforts of the King and restored to its pristine glory.

He proceeded on his pilgrimage to many many shrines on either side of the River Cauvery. In due course, after visiting Thiruvaanaikkaa, Erumbiyoor, (now known as Thiruverumboor, near which is situated the factory of BHEL) and Thirupparaaiththurai, he was approaching Thiruppaingeeli. On the way, he was overtaken by fatigue and hunger. Sekkizhaar says:

As he was proceeding on his way,
  extremely fatigued and wearied,
he was beset by thirst and hunger,
  which was destroying his very vitals.
Undaunted, the King of Speech was slogging on.
The Lord bearing an eye on the forehead,
  Who had His abode in Paingeeli of fragrant groves,
was graciously moved to relieve
  the sufferings of his devotee.

Creating by His grace a grove with a pond,
  He assumed the guise of an ash-smeared brahmin,
eager to act as a guide,
  and, bearing on his head a bundle of appetising food,
stood on the way
  through which the King of Speech was to pass.
Thus stood the Lord rare to behold
  by Brahma flying in the sky as a bird,
or by Vishnu in the form of a boar

tearing the bowels of the earth
in an attempt to find the crown
and the feet of the Lord.

On Appar arriving at the place
where the brahmin was waiting for him,
the Lord of the Vedas astride the bull of fiery eyes
stood before him, and addressed him thus:
'You are very tired coming this long way;
here I have with me a packet of food,
do eat it, and drink the water
of this pond fed by bubbling springs;
after you are rid of you weariness,
you may go on your way.'

And Appar, as if he understood
that this was an act of grace of our Lord,
received the food without a second thought
when the holy brahmin offered it, saying, 'Eat this,'
and ate heartily,
took a drink of the sweet water;
and was rid of his fatigue.

T. st. 304-7

Thus ever and always the Lord is the servant of his servants.

Looking at him who stood refreshed,
the brahmin asked 'Where are you going?'
Appar replied, 'I am going to Thiruppaingeeli.'
and the Peerless One said, 'I too am going there.'

T. st. 308

Saying so, He accompanied Appar. On approaching Thiruppaingeeli, the brahmin suddenly disappeared. At once Appar realised that the Dancing Lord Himself had come in the guise of a brahmin, and, saying to himself, 'My Lord considered even this slave a thing worthy of His grace and bestowed His mercy on me,' sang a song of praise while a rain of tears poured from his eyes.

Sacred hills, lands, and shrines where the Lord abides, many such Appar visited after leaving Thiruppaingeeli and arrived at

Thiruvannaamali.

Appar's was a trek of faith from Thirumaraikkaadu to Nagaippattinam, Tiruchiraapalli, Thiruvannaamalai and therefrom to Kaanchi, Thirukkazhukkundram, Thiruvaanmiyoor on the outskirts of Madras, Mylapore, Thiruvettriyoor on the northern outskirts of Madras, until he reached Thirukkaalatthi where a snake and an elephant are said to have worshipped Lord Civan abiding in the temple there. It is on a hill adjacent to Kaalatthi that the Lord abides for Whom Kannappar gouged out his eye to put in the place of an eye of the Lord which was bleeding profusely. From all accounts, Kannappar seems to be the most ancient of all the saints whose chronicles Sekkizhaar has recorded in his Periyapuraanam.

Appar ascended the Hill, and stood before the Lord, Who centuries ago had grasped the hand which Kannappar had raised to gouge his other eye, and saying, 'Kannappar! Stop!', prevented him from gouging his other eye as well. From that day, the hunter's son, who had been named at birth as Thinnappan, has been known by the name, 'Kannappan' conferred on him by Lord Civan Himself.

Moved by the remembrance of the glory conferred on Kannappar, Appar sang:

Behold Him the poverty-stricken One
Who cannot buy his food!
behold Kamban of the wonderful Kaanchi!
behold the very wise One who has no other food
than the alms bestowed on Him!
behold the Brave One of the cremation-ground!
behold the flawless golden Pillar (of fire)!
behold Him Who resembles
a perfect hill of precious stones!
behold the granite Pillar which had been holding up
unfalteringly the seven worlds!
behold the Lord of the cortege of ghouls
Whom I beheld in Kaalatthi!
He is within me!

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 8, st. 1

It was here that Appar was seized with an insatiable desire to pay his homage to Lord Civan at Mount Kailas itself.

CHAPTER 14

Kailasward Ho!

Sekkizhaar records:

After worshipping the Medicine
  for the disease of birth and death
    abiding on the great hill,
urged by swelling love
  born by the flood of grace of the Lord,
and impelled by a desire, he went forward
  in the direction of the north.
After he had crossed lofty mountain ranges and wild rivers
  and territories which came across his way
    in unbroken succession,
he arrived at Thirupparuppatham—
where abides the great One
  with the bull of fiery eyes
    which is no other than Lord Vishnu.

T. st. 348

Appar worshipped with song the Lord abiding at Thiruppa-ruppatham which is also known by the name of Mallikaarjunam. Arjunam is the name in Sanskrit for Marutham, a tree, and since this hilly region was abounding in that kind of tree, it is so known. Two other places, which, however, are situated in Tamil-nadu, are also called by the name of the tree on account of the same reason. One of them is Thiruvidaimaruthoor in Colanadu.

Sekkizhaar continues:

Appar who left that area,
impelled by a single mindedness
arising from thoughts of the snow white Kailai mount
of the perfect One
armed with the sharp trident,
proceeded with no desire to visit any place anywhere else.
Accompanied on either side by astounded devotees,
he arrived at Karnataka
after crossing the Andhra territory which lay on his way.

idem. st. 350.

When he arrived at the border
where ended the land of the black soil—Karnataka,
he marched on leaving behind him the forests
dotting the territories he crossed,
and, leaving behind ghats
of all the sacred rivers in between,
and long ranges of mountains
and many prosperous lands,
he arrived at Malwa
where the sun makes a detour
unable to go over the groves abounding with trees
which grow to exceedingly great heights.

Traversing the whole length of that country,
crossing uncrossable deserts,
leaving behind him the Laada country
which abounds with strings of dharmasaalaas,
crossing cloud-capped lofty mountains, forests, and rivers,
he arrived at Madyapaithiram
of lotus-filled fields.

idem, st. 351-2

It was, while crossing the north Karnataka territory that Appar made his pilgrimage to Gokarnam which is on the western sea coast between Marmagoa and Mangalore. Appar is the only one of the saints of Tamilnadu who had visited this shrine. The place takes its name from a special feature of the Lingam in the temple there. The Lingam is shaped like the ear

of a cow. Standing before the Lingam Appar sang:

This is the place where abides Lord Civan.
Behold Him Who made the moon
and the cool waters of the Ganga meet,
behold Him of the trailing matted locks,
behold Him Who becomes ambrosia
to those Who take refuge in Him,
behold Him Who destroyed the three cities of the Asuras
which were suspended in mid-air,
behold Him Who becomes that form
in which His devotees conceive Him.
behold Him Who sang the Four Vedas
of great musical merit,
behold Him Who is the Being hidden
in the Vedic Mantras.
He is established for ever and ever
in Gokarnam surrounded by the vast sea.

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 49, st. 1

Sekkizhaar records:

Appar crossed that country
and worshipped with ardour
the Lord of the locks of matted hair
surpassing the lightning in splendour
abiding in Varanasi
around which goes clockwise the Ganga
which came down from the skies
and ran down the Himalayan slopes.
There he left behind all those who had followed him,
and, crossing the Ganga,
the yearning-filled King of Speech
arrived at the barren mountainous foot of the Himalayas.

Notwithstanding that he was faced by forests
abounding in trees which grew sky high,
and that he could find no path
by which a man could penetrate them,
yet, filled with welling-up love,
he forsook eating

even dried leaves, tubers and fruit
 and travelled even by night
that he might arrive at
 the peerless great Kaịlas mountain.

Near that devotee hurrying in such darkness,
 even beasts who were evil ones so long
 feared to approach
and carry out their cruel deeds;
 snakes of mouths
 that served as store-houses of poison,
lighted him on his way
 with sparkling precious stones on their heads.
Thus Appar hastened across the stony desert
 which even the devas dare not cross on foot.

T. st. 353-55

During the day the fiery rays of the sun entered the clefts in the land and scorched the denizens of the underworld, and even the shady interiors of the clefts seemed red-hot walls of fire. Appar of undaunted courage went on. Sekkizhaar continues:

Thus night and day he traversed
 that hard-to-cross barren land.
Even though the flesh of his lotus-like soles
 was worn out to the bones,
would he ever forget the goal of his mind
 on the snow covered mountain
 of the Partner of Paarvathi?
He proceeded on his way
 hopping with the help of his two hands.

Even after the hands and the wrists were worn out
 and dislocated,
the ardour of his love which arose from his mind
 flowed through his body
and surged up more and more!
Wherefore the devotee of the Lord with the dusky throat
 attempted to crawl on his chest

and proceed hugging the pathway
from which smoke was rising
due to the scorching heat.

When even the flesh of the chest was worn
and lay in shreds all along the way,
and the ribs held in place by the flesh
had also cracked,
Appar, the Perfect One, his love-filled mind
steadfast on the hard-to-gain goal,
was impelled by the ardour of that love
to search for and see the Lord.
To the ruin of the flesh of the entire body,
driven onward by the spirit within,
he rolled and rolled along the path
in the forest hard to arrive at for others.

When midway on the long path he was rolling forward,
his entire body had been completely worn out,
only his mind could now go forward
and reach the indescribable Kailas Mountain.
As regards his body,
after all his external organs had worn out,
even effort to roll forward slowly ceased.
There, on the path lay in a swoon
our saint of great command of Tamil.

The Transcendent Being
with the snake coiled round His chest,
Who had withheld His grace
from our saint reaching Kailas
that His devotee might continue to worship Him on earth
in the eternally sweet Tamil,
came walking along in the guise of a Rishi
bringing with him a water-filled pond
that would extend a fair long way.

He came near Appar, stood before him,
looked at him grievingly,
and, on Appar meeting his eye,

He asked, 'What is the purpose of your arriving
in this cruel forest in this grievious condition,
with your limbs worn out to tatters?'
Looking at Him Who stood before him
seeming verily a true Thapasvi—
with spotless garment of wooden bark round his waist,
with the thread of three strands on his chest,
with the crown of shining matted locks,
and with the sacred ash adorning his body—
Appar, the Great, gaining strength to speak,
answered at length thus:
'I have lovingly arrived here
with a desire to see the manner
in which the Lord of the Universe
is seated in state on Kailas in the north
along with the Mountain Maid
over Whose tresses bees are hovering,
and worship Him.
O Sage, this is the object I have in mind.'
On his saying so,

The Lord addressed him in these words:
'Is the great Kailas Mountain easy of access
to creatures like men who sojourn on earth?
Since it is impossible of being approached
even by the devas
equipped with sharp spears for arms,
what are you doing in this cruel barren land
scorched by the sun?

'To go back is your duty hereafter.
On the sage, with shoulders bright with sacred ash
and a chest on which a thread of three strands lay across,
saying so,
Appar refused and said,
'Unless I see the Lord, Who rules over me,
seated in state on Kailas
I will not return
bearing this body subject to death.

Realising the determination of Appar,
the great sage disappeared in the sky
that Appar might know Him
for Who He is,
and spoke in a voice from afar:
'O King of Speech of waxing glory! Rise!'
Appar rose, his body rid of all injuries,
shining with a glow of inner light.

'O glorious One!
O Ambrosia Who graciously have enslaved me!
O Lord of the Vedas Who bestow grace on me,
hiding Yourself in the sky!
Do graciously condescend that I may approach
and see You seated in state on the holy Kailas
and adore You.'
Saying so, he fell at His Feet.

Looking at the good devotee who had risen up
after worshipping Him,
the Lord commanded him in a loud holy voice
issuing out of the sky,
'Dive in this pond and see Us
in Thiruvaiyaaru of unblemished glory
just exactly in the same state
as We are seated in Kailas.

Appar rose bearing on his head the gracious command
of the Lord Who had redeemed him,
and
pleased with the utterance of Him
Who stood (as part of and) apart
from human beings
and in the sky as well,
worshipped Him.
Regaining his strength, he chanted the Mystic Five Letters,
and, as commanded by the Lord, dived
in the large pond nearby.

T. st. 356-70

CHAPTER 15

Dakshina Kailas

Sekkizhaar continues:

Who could assess the greatness
of the grace of our Primordial Lord?
Our saint of great penance
dived into the pond filled with dew-laden flowers,
and appeared to the amazement of the world
in a well in Aiyaaru
where the Partner of Paarvathi delights to dwell,
and climbed up to the surface from the well.

Ascending to the surface of the well
of fragrance-wafting flowers,
Appar keenly aware of the greatness
of the holy grace of the Lord of the heavenly ones,
exclaimed, 'Indeed this is the fruit
of the rare grace of our Lord!'
He stood there drenched with torrents of tears,
seeming as if he had just risen
after a dive into the well.

Appar, proceeding to worship the rosy feet
of the Lord Who had as His abode Aiyaaru
resplendent with streets
decorated with rows and rows of
closely-strung buntings,
beheld the entire immobile creatures,

and mobile ones as well,
each with its mate
filling resplendently the entire town.

Our Sage paid his respects
to all the multifarious genus of creatures
resembling the state of Sakthi and Civan,
thus transforming Aiyaaru
into the very image of the great snow-clad mount
where the Lord abides
alongwith the Off-spring of the Golden Mount.
Thus reviewing the procession of creatures,
he arrived at the temple of our Lord.

The King of Speech beheld
the great temple before him
transformed into the huge Kailas mount,
he heard issuing therefrom
the songs sung with devoted love
in praise of the Lord
by the great devas headed by
Vishnu, Brahma, Indra,
all cherishing the Lord in their hearts.
He heard the reverberation of the chant
of all the great eternal Vedas,
each and each sounding severally.

The devas, the demons, Siddhas, Vingnaatharars,
Iyakars, great Thapasvis, Ascetics,
he found them all crowded around,
and heard the songs sung to the beat of the drums
by the Arambaiyars—
with eyes that put to shame
the blue lotus and the sword.
The sound surpassed the great roar
of the matchless seven seas.

He saw
the waters of the great divine rivers

headed by the Ganga come—
assuming forms of great lakes,
filled with beatific pure water–
to worship the Lord;
he heard
the chiefs of the cortege of the Lord
fill every space around
and praise the Lord;
he beheld
the ghostly ghouls,
who form the retinue of the Lord
adore Him, playing instruments
from which music poured out.

Making those who came there think
that there were two cool snow-covered great hills,
the great bull of fiery eyes
stood before the Lord.
Rejoicing at the precedence gained by him
as a result of the great *thavam*
done in the past,
he went forward, making his way
between Nandi of our Lord
and the assembled devotees.

There our King of Speech
saw before him
the bounteous Lord seated with Her,
Daughter of the great mountain,
Who had appropriated His left side.
The bounteous Lord resembled a coral crag
of great lucent luminosity
overgrown by an emerald vine,
set atop a snow-clad mountain.

He scooped with his eyes
the blissful sea before him,
and with palms joined together, fell and rose,
fell and rose on the ground
before the Lord.

With his body quivering with joy
he stood in front of the Lord of the Universe
and danced, sang, wept.
Who indeed could describe
what happened there
to this servant of the Lord?

T st 371-80.

Thus Lord Civan made accessible to Appar at very close quarters the scene of His Grace Lord Civan, just as He was seated in far off Kailas.

Appar, filled with ecstasy and overcome by emotion, praised the Lord of golden matted locks in several songs set to tunes which go with a lilt.

On the Lord departing after conferring on Appar the vision, the devotee of devotees still longing for the prolongation of the blissful vision, finally consoled himself saying, 'This much only is, probably, the extent of the grace of my Lord on this occasion,' and sang:

With intent to enter behind those
who, bearing flowers and water
were entering the temple
singing the praises of the Lord
with the chaplet of the lovely crescent moon
and of the Daughter
of the King of the Mountains,
when I was approaching Aiyaaru
leaving no imprint of my steps anywhere,
beheld I tuskers coming along
with their gentle mates;
beheld I His holy feet,
beheld I what I had never known
by sight ever before.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 3, st. 1.

I came along pirouetting
and adoring the Lord
with cries of 'Hallowed be You!'
'Obeisance to You!'

and singing the praises of the Lord
with the chaplet of the fragmentary moon
and of Her with flower-soft garment.
When I was approaching Aiyaaru
where Vishnu skilled
in wielding the disc
stood worshipping our Lord,
beheld I the male birds
along with their mates
coolly come down,
beheld I His holy feet,
beheld I what I had never known
by sight ever before!

idem. st. 2.

He beheld
the striped quail with its mate. . .
the rooster with its beautiful young mate. . .
the pea-hen with the peacocks come in pairs . . .
the colourful andril[1] with his hopping mate . . .
the boar of thundering voice and its mate . . .
the black chimpanzee with his mate . . .
the crane with its goodly mate . . .
the green parrot with his mate . . .
the bull with its heifer recently mated. . . .
all come pair by pair along the path.

idem, one line from st. 3 onwards.

Appar saw with his eyes a sight given to no one else to see—God immanent in all His creatures. He looked around and saw none but God, God in many forms and shapes, but God nevertheless,

1. Andril—a kind of bird.

CHAPTER 16

Humble are the Strong

Reluctantly leaving Thiruvaiyaaru, Appar visited many shrines on the way and arrived at Thirupponthuruththi. He was fascinated by the place and stayed quite a long time there, and sang many songs in praise of Lord Civan abiding in the temple there. This is the only place where Appar established a mutt — a place where the devotees, generation after generation, may live worshipping Lord Civan and cherish the Caiva Faith.

It was here that Appar sang the famous song setting out his credo:

No matter they bestow on me
Sanganidhi and *Padmanidhi*[1]
or the sovereignty
over heaven and earth,
We would not set store
by their perishable wealth,
if they are not single-minded devotees
to Maadevar, our Lord Civan.
(On the other hand)
even if they are people
with limbs rotted, eaten away by leprosy,
and, wretches who skin the cow and eat its flesh,
provided they are devotees

1. Sanganidhi, Padmanidhi—units of wealth, like centillion and higher units of money.

to Him Who has the River Ganga
in His matted locks,
take note that they, indeed, are the God
We worship.

Tm. Vol. IV, d. 95, st. 10.

Thus sang Appar ever true to the injunction laid on every adherent of Caiva Siddhaantha to worship the devotees of Civan as verily Civan Himself. This was the guiding principle of the greatest Brotherhood on earth of devotees of the Lord, irrespective of sect, caste, race, language or sex.

While he was staying there, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar was on his way to that place after he had defeated in religious polemics the mighty Jain Monks and had straightened the hump of the Paandiyan King by the miraculous power of the sacred ash. Hearing that the King of Speech was staying at Poonthuruththi, he told his devotees, 'I shall hasten to him,' and arrived at the outskirts of the town.

Vaakeesar – of great fame and object of worship of the world—rejoiced on hearing the news, and, filled with a desire to gain an eye-filling delightful darsan of Sanbai-born Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, adept in Tamil, and worship him, set out with great eagerness to meet him.

Arriving at the place where Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar had come up to, Appar mingled in the throng of devotees surrounding the Child without anybody noticing him, paid his homage, and said to himself, 'I shall bear with this ageing body the palanquin adorned with strings of pearls which bears the Child who has come to give new life to the people of this land.' He proceeded to put his resolve into action, and, joining those who were bearing the palanquin, he too gave a shoulder and went along with delighted mind, undiscovered by any one. Sekkizhaar records:

The great sage Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar
nearing Poonthuruththi where Appar was,
asked, 'where is Appar?'
With melting heart, Appar answered,
'I, your slave,
having gained the great privilege and blessing

of carrying your sacred feet,
am here!'
The Child, no sooner than he heard this,
dropped down from the palanquin in great hurry
and, with distressed mind, came up
to where Appar was and fell at his feet.
The magnanimous Lord of Speech prostrated in turn
even before the prostrating Child's body
had touched the ground.
The devotees of the Lord
with the hand bearing the frisking deer
loudly acclaimed this unique event
and adored them both.

T, st 396-97

Thiruvalluvar said, 'Ever and always, humble will be the great,' and Chuangtse, the great exponent of the Chinese Mystic, Lao Tse, a seer, as great as those who uttered the Upanishads, who lived several centuries before Valluvar, as if writing a commentary in advance to the Thirukkural maxim, has bequeathed to us an inscription left by Chengk'aofu, his tenth generation ancestor:

> 'On my first promotion, I bent my head. On my second promotion, I bent from my waist. On my third promotion, I prostrated myself. I walked close to the walls on the side of the street and no one dared to insult me.' 'As for the common men,' observes Chuangtse, 'they begin to swagger on their first promotion. On their second promotion, they begin to dance on the wagon. On their third promotion they begin to call themselves the elders.'

This unique, and never-after repeated incident, in which two great saints met, is a classic instance of humility arising from strength.

CHAPTER 17

The Last Lap

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar related to Appar the epic of his victory over the Jains in Madurai and aroused in Appar a desire to see Paandiyanadu and worship the Lord abiding in the temple at Madurai. Appar reached Madurai where he was regally entertained by the Chief Minister, the Queen, and the King. Taking leave of them, he went further south and arrived at Raamaeswaram where he worshipped the Lord Whom milleniums ago Sri Rama had worshipped and had expiated thereby the sin of killing Ravana who, despite being a person deserving of being killed, was, nevertheless, a brahmin.

Appar retraced his steps northwards and arrived at Poompukaloor, a place of pleasant memory to him, as meeting Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar here resulted in both of them spending a year or more in each other's company visiting many many shrines of Lord Civan.

Here Appar sang many many decads, and abode happily for a long time serving the Lord in his characteristic manner of ridding the precincts of the temple of the weeds and thorny shrubs and flints and stones on the pathway.

While he was engaged thus in his vocation, Lord Civan set an ordeal for Appar, not so much to test him as to show to the world how devoid of desire Appar was. Extirpation of Desire is the last and indispensable discipline which an aspirant has to acquire before he can be blessed with mukti. It is to be remembered that the chapter on this discipline follows, in the Thirukkural, the chapter on The Apprehension of The Real. For, a

human being, in the very nature of things, has to attach himself to something or the other. If he has to give up one attachment he must take up another attachment. It is for this reason that Thiruvalluvar said:

Take up attachment to Him without attachments;
hold on to that Attachment in order
to leave (other) attachments.

The Lord willed that, wherever the hoe of Appar penetrated, gems and gold should come up along with the dirt and grit. Thus when, along with the rolling grit, gems and pellets of gold rolled out, Appar took them up on his hoe and flung them along with the dirt into a neighbouring well filled with fragrant lotus flowers. Sekkizhaar records:

Thereupon, in front of our saint,
who had arrived at a staunch state of mind
of not differentiating between grass and grit,
and gold and gems,
there descended from the sky
by the holy will of the Lord
abiding in Thirupukaloor
lovely damsels with foreheads
resembling strung bows.
They danced, sang,
rained a shower of flowers on him,
approached him as if they would embrace him,
and with coiled tresses come unstuck,
and swaying hips,
ran away from him.
They returned again along with Cupid
and strolled about with light of lust in their eyes,
or stood confronting him
with disheveled dress.

Appar remained unmoved and went on with his work. The heavenly dancers, finding him no prey to their wiles, departed after paying homage to him.

Appar, who had come unscathed from the ordeal, spent

some more days there. Then, urged by a growing longing to reach the haven of the feet of the Lord, he sang:

Thinker as I am,
    what shall I dwell upon and think about
unless I think of nothing but
    the holy feet of our Lord?
I, who have no other succour than You,
eyeless would be
unless, with joined palms, I see
nothing other than Your anklet-girt-feet!
O Lord Who provided
  in this one dwelling—my body—nine doors!
When they all are closed at one and the same time,
  I may not feel this same way;
therefore, O Virtuous One,
  here and now,
to Your feet I am coming,
  O Virtuous One abiding in Poompukaloor!

Tm. Vol. VI, d, 99, st. 1

And forthwith Appar abandoned his body, and, for ever and ever, was seated at the feet of the Great One.

CHAPTER 18

The Message of Appar

Fearlessness, Faith, Humility, and Service, these words sum up the life of Appar.

'Subject to anyone We are not,' Appar declared to the emissaries sent by the Pallava King to summon him to his court to stand trial for treachery, heresy and apostasy.

> There is nothing which We dread,
> no dreadful thing can befall Us.

These were the words with which he faced the mad rutting elephant which towered over him with lifted foot to squelch the life out of him and tear his body limb by limb. Lord Krishna, instructing Arjuna in the divine and the demoniacal qualities (*Bhagavad-Gita* XVI-1) placed 'Fearlessness' at the head of 32 qualities which characterise a person of divine qualities.

'Fear, indeed, is the basis of the good conduct of the vile', said Thiruvalluvar, the Law-giver of Tamilnadu.

From the moment Appar stood before the presence of Lord Civan abiding at Athikai-Veerattaanam, having been hauled there by his sister to answer the charge of apostasy, Appar shed all fear. In the Court of the Highest Judge on earth or heaven, Appar fearlessly pleaded 'not guilty' in the strongest terms, terms which confound us by their seemingly preposterous nature and daring bordering on bravado. No guilty person could, however, have put up such a plea with a straight face.

This undaunted reply to the emissaries of the Pallava King was born of this fearlessness born in its turn by faith in the King of kings. Having already shed all fear, he could say:

The vast world is Our country;
in every town and village,
whoever cooks food
will eat only after serving a guest;
never would they desist from giving alms.
Our shelter are the common courtyards.
Goddess Earth will never toss out of bed
those who lie on her breast.
No lie is all this, verily truth it is.
The Lord Who owns the bellicose bull
has adopted Us,
free of all guilt We are!
No more have We any wants;
rid of all afflictions,
We are not bound to listen to the orders
of those who strut about
clad in fine clothes
and decked with golden ornaments.

Tm. Vol. VI, d. 98, st. 2

The Key to this fearlessness lies in the words: 'The Lord Who owns the bellicose bull has adopted Us.' Elsewhere Appar sings, 'We are the protege of the Lord.'

St. Paul the Apostle said in his famous epistle to the Hebrews:

And what is FAITH?
Faith gives substance to our hopes,
and makes us certain of realities
we do not see.
It is for their faith that the men of old
stand on record.

Giving several instances of the power and victory of Faith, Paul concludes,

> Need I say more? Time is too short for me to tell the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. Through faith they over-threw kingdoms, established justice, saw God's promises fulfilled. They muzzled ravening lions, quenched the fury of fire, escaped death by the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength, they grew powerful in war, they put foreign armies to rout. Women received back their dead raised to life. Others were tortured to death, disdaining release, to win a better resurrection. Others, again, had to face jeers and flogging, even fetters and prison bars. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to the sword, they went about dressed in skins of sheep or goats, in poverty, distress, and misery. They were too good for this world. They were refugees in deserts and on the hills, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith.

This unshakeable faith was the bed-rock of the fearlessness of Appar. It was also the source of his confidence and courage, and tenacity.

It was with the confidence born of this faith that Appar ventured to bring to life the eldest son of Appoothi Adıkal by extolling the qualities of the Lord, one by one till he counted ten. Again, it was this same faith that gave him the courage and the tenacity to walk, hop, crawl on the chest, and roll his way from Kaalaththi to Kailas. Nothing else could have sustained him. Once more, it was this faith which made Appar dive into the pond shown by the Lord of Kailas fully confident that he would surface in a well in Thiruvaiyaaru.

Faith moves mountains.

Service was the raison d'etre of Appar.

He lived to do service. When he was a wealthy landlord he had ponds dug, wells sunk, water-booths set up, instituted endowments for charitable inns, bestowed largesses on the learned, and gave liberally to the poor. When he chose to be the rich man of the maxim of Henry David Thoreau, who said, 'A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he could afford to let well alone', Appar began rendering *shramdan* by bodily labour, by the most humble form of physical labour of keeping

the precincts of the temples of God free of weeds and thorns, of flint and grit so that the feet of the devotees of the Lord may not be hurt. Thus, in effect, he worshipped the feet of the devotees of the Lord, even as he worshipped the tiny feet of the Child who had not yet entered his teens. For Appar's strength lay in his humility.

The message of Appar to our world opening its morning newspapers with trepidation is fearlessness, faith, wealth of voluntary poverty, service, and humility.

CHAPTER 19

Appar's Place among the Naalvars

Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, Appar or Thiru-naavukku-arasar, Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal and Maanikkavaachakar are lovingly called Naalvar, The Four. Maanikkavaachakar is the earliest of these four, belonging as he does to the 3rd Century A.D. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and Appar were, as we saw, contemporaries. Sundaramoorthi Swamikal came a century after them. Maanik-kavaachakar's major work is the Thiruvaachakam, a hand-book of mystical theology. It is the account of a soul groping its way to union with the Godhead. Almost everyone of the 656 stanzas reduces us to tears. Such is the effect of the pathos, of the yearning, of the self-condemnation, of the faith in God. All these are unparalleled in the volume of devotional literature in Tamil. Great as is the merit of Appar's songs, they do not, however, have this appeal.

Pilgrimage to the shrines of Lord Civan is not the theme of the Thiruvaachakam. Maanikkavaachakar's object was not to exhort people to see the glories of their religion, much less was it to combat the evil influence of other religions. The Thiruvaachakam is the biography of a soul in its search for and travel to union with the Godhead. It is the story of a spiritual bride and a divine bridegroom, their courtship and ultimate union, the bride in this case being Maanikkavaachakar. In spite of the Thirutthanadakams, Appar's special field of excellence, Appar's literary rank cannot approach that of Maanikkavaachakar. This is no discredit to Appar. Maanikkavaachkar is a case of a convict pleading pathetically, impassionedly, for his own life;

We can dismiss Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal with a word or two. With his visit to 83 shrines, his 100 decads and 1026 stanzas, even in the matter of volume he cannot stand comparison with Appar with his visit to 125 shrines and his 312 decads comprising 3064 stanzas. Moreover, by and large, a study of Sundarmoorthi Swaamikal's Thevaram leaves us with a feeling that we are listening to an importunate beggar, may be an imperious beggar, who was obsessed with his domestic problems, problems of courtship of two women, problems of marriage with two women, problems of the wherewithal to maintain two households. Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, of course, had a disadvantage of having been preceded very recently by two eminent devotees of God, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and Appar. In fact, in a moment of unconscious candidness, Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal says in one of his songs that he is but repeating what his predecessors had said.

If any fair comparison could be made, it would be only between Appar and Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar. To 125 shrines, 312 decads and 3064 stanzas of Appar, Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar could show a pilgrimage to 219 shrines, and an output of 383 decads comprising 4152 stanzas. Though outnumbered in these respects, it is Appar's songs which have made a deep impression on the common man in Tamilnadu. It is said that a great savant of the first half of this century, who held what may be called a literary salon every day in his house which many used to consider a privilege to be allowed to attend, used to think poorly of the poetry of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar and call it childish. He seems to have forgotten that Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar was a child, just that, with an extraordinary capacity for wonder. His poetry, therefore, has all the marks of a child, and rightly so too. There is a repetitiveness which is the characteristic of a child. There is also an awe and wonder at the marvels of nature which is again a characteristic of a child. It is unfair to compare this child and his outpourings with the works of a mature and learned saint who had been purified in the crucibles of many many trials and tribulations.

Having made all the excuses for Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, I must confess that nowhere in all his 383 decads does he reach the heights of devotion which characterises everyone of Appar's 980 stanzas of the 99 decads of Thirutthaandakams of the

Sixth Thirumurai. But the roles of the two in the world were different. Appar was essentially a penitent petitioner, a *mumukshu*, an aspirant for mukthi. He sings with a burdened heart. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar, on the other hand is not a mumukshu. He was an Eeswarakoti who had already attained mukthi in an earlier birth. His was not a soul which had taken birth on earth as a result of its past karma. Karma and the soul of Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar had parted company long ago. His soul voluntairly chose to be born on earth to redeem mankind. This is the reason why Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar did not receive any form of deekshai, initiation by touch or the casting of a gracious glance, or the impartation of a mystic and mantric word, or thiruvadi-deekshai, that is, the guru or Lord Civan placing His foot on the head of the aspirant or disciple. Maanikkavaachakar, Sundaramoorthi Swamikal and Appar, all received the thiruvadi-deekshai. Thiru-gnaana-sambandhar did not. He had no sins to confess, he had no shortcomings to bemoan. In the words of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, he was an Eeswarakoti, not a Jeevakoti. In the circumstances, there is no point in comparing him with Appar, or, for that matter, with Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal or Maanikkavaachakar. He was a man apart.

The best of literary compositions come out of a burdened heart, burdened with love, burdened with misery and unhappiness. And Appar's heart was such a one. Therefore it is no wonder that his songs come to the memory of the common man more often than those of the other two, and his songs give him hope and inspiration.

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